

## STARGAZING

(Matthew 2: 1-12)

Intro: When the ice came down.  
-And the lights went out.

Did you ever look up?  
-Beyond the broken tree limbs.  
-Beyond the dangling utility lines.

It was dark enough to see the stars.

### I. The Magi Were Stargazers.

#### A. Who Were The Magi?

1. Astronomers.
  - a. People who studied the stars.
  - b. People who could tell one star from another.
2. Astrologers.
  - a. People who believed there were mystical messages in the stars.
    - Appearance of a new star.
      - #Coincided with the birth of an important person.
    - Falling star.
      - #Coincided with the death of an important person.
  - b. From "magi."
    - We get our word for magic.
      - #Acts 8:9-24 tells the story of another magician.
      - \*Simon Magus.
      - \*Not in very flattering terms.
3. Matthew's Gospel does not:
  - a. Number them.
    - Although tradition has put the number at three.
      - #Because of their three gifts.
  - b. Name them.
    - Although tradition has come up with names.
      - #Caspar.
        - \*Often portrayed as a beardless young man.
      - #Melchior.
        - \*Often portrayed as a bearded old man.
      - #Balthasar.
        - \*Often portrayed as a black-skinned man.

- c. Call them kings.
    - Although there are Old Testament references.
      - #Kings drawn to the light.
        - \*Isaiah 60:3.
      - #Kings bringing gifts and worshipping.
        - \*Psalm 72:10-11.
  - d. Call them wise men.
    - Although the NRSV translates "magi" with that term.
    - Although they're smart enough:
      - #To track the star.
      - #Not to go back to Herod.
4. Foreigners.
- a. Gentiles.
  - b. Pagans.
  - c. Outsiders.
    - Yet drawn by the star of Bethlehem.
      - #New star.
      - #Star that was rising.

#### B. Magi Looked Up.

- 1. They saw the big picture.
  - 2. They saw the whole sky.
  - 3. They saw light in the darkness.
  - 4. They saw something new.
  - 5. They were overwhelmed with joy.
  - 6. They worshiped the Christ child.
  - 7. They offered their gifts.
    - a. Gold.
    - b. Frankincense.
    - c. Myrrh.
      - Expensive gifts.
      - Gifts fit for a king.
      - Gifts that would foreshadow:
        - #Jesus' betrayal.
          - \*For 30 pieces of silver.
            - +Matthew 27:9.
          - #Jesus' burial.
            - \*Jesus' body anointed with spices.
              - +John 19:39.
- They looked up.
  - They saw light in the darkness.

C. Herod Looked Down.

1. He was the ultimate insider.
2. He saw the little picture.
3. He saw what was old.
4. He saw a potential threat to his earthly kingdom.
5. He saw darkness and operated under the cover of darkness.
6. He was overcome with fear.
  - a. All of Jerusalem with him.
  - b. Matthew 2:3.

II. Where Do We Look When We Are In The Dark?

A. When The Lights Seem To Have Gone Out On Us.

1. Family strife.
2. Financial struggles.
3. Career crisis.
4. Health fails.
5. Test results show cancer.
6. Loved one dies.

B. It's Tempting To Look Down.

1. To focus on the darkness.
  - a. Our Church Council.
    - In the process of putting together a budget proposal.
      - #For 2008.
      - #You'll see it next week.
      - #We'll have our congregational meeting in two weeks.
    - I know it's important.
      - #To have a budget.
      - #To be responsible stewards.
        - \*Of the gifts God has given to us.
    - But it's so easy to become absorbed with the little picture.
      - #Income.
      - #Expenses.
        - \*Wondering if there will be enough.
          - +Of the former to cover the latter.
    - If that becomes the focus.
      - #Of my ministry.
      - #Of our life together.
        - \*I'll be crazy.
        - \*We will be lost in the darkness.
    - I have to look at a bigger picture.
      - #Trusting that God will provide what we need.

- b. My son Joel gave me two books for Christmas.
  - Books I wouldn't choose to buy for myself.
    - #Books that are important for me to read.
      - \*To try to understand what is important to him.
  - One of those books.
    - #23 Minutes in Hell.
      - \*I began to read it this last week.
        - +While I was at Sears.
          - =Waiting for a new car battery to be installed.
            - My experience at Sears wasn't hell at all.
      - \*Story of a man who claims he spent 23 minutes in hell.
        - +Not in a dream.
        - +But in a real-life experience.
          - =At least in his way of thinking.
      - \*This book has some serious problems.
        - +It's totally in the dark.
          - =Clueless when it comes to understanding.
            - What the Old Testament says about hell.
              - #Absolutely nothing.
            - What the Scriptures say about the grace of God.
              - =Choosing to focus on the darkness.
                - Instead of on the light.
              - =Choosing the path of fear.
                - As though we'll be scared into heaven.
      - Joel's other book.
        - #90 Minutes in Heaven.
          - \*I'll have to see if that book is any more enlightening.
    - c. Do we focus?
      - On the darkness?
      - On the light?
  - 2. To focus on earthly stars.
    - a. Comparing ourselves to others.
      - Who may appear to be better off than we are.
    - b. Hollywood has its Walk of Fame.
      - Stars of the stars.
        - #Literally imbedded in the concrete.
    - c. St. Louis has a Walk of Fame.
      - It's in the Delmar Loop.
        - #About a mile from my old house.
      - There are over 100 St. Louisans honored there.
        - #Some are sports figures.
          - \*Stan Musial.                      \*Yogi Berra.
          - \*Bob Gibson.                      \*Joe Garagiola.
          - \*Lou Brock.                      \*Dizzy Dean.

#Some are from other walks of life.

\*Chuck Berry.

\*Phyllis Diller.

\*T.S. Eliot.

\*Betty Grable.

\*Scott Joplin.

\*Charles Lindbergh.

\*Vincent Price.

\*Ike & Tina Turner.

#There are many more.

\*Some whose names you might recognize.

\*Others you've probably never heard of.

d. But their stars are on the ground.

-Which I think is highly symbolic.

#You can walk on them.

#You can ride your bicycle over them.

#Leaves can obscure them.

-These stars leave us:

#Looking down.

#Not looking up.

### C. Are We Stargazers?

1. Isaiah 60:3.

a. "Lift up your eyes and look around."

b. Look beyond:

-Tree limbs.

-Power lines.

-Cancer.

-Budgets.

c. Look at the light that shines in the darkness.

2. My dad got to be a wise man.

a. Not only because he is:

-Smart.

-Bright.

-Insightful.

#Still at 92.

b. But because he lives in a retirement community.

-Where they put on a Christmas pageant.

-My dad got to be one of the magi.

#Dressed like one of the magi.

\*In a costume created by the residents.

c. In this play my dad had no lines.

-No part to memorize.

#Although he could have handled that.

- d. All he had to do:
    - Look up.
    - Follow the star.
    - Worship the Christ child.
    - Give his gift.
  - e. Is that so hard?
    - Couldn't we do that?
      - #Lift up our eyes.
      - \*And our hearts.
      - #See the light in the darkness.
      - #Follow the star.
3. Where is the star leading us?
- a. My Son Joel.
    - Last Sunday.
      - #Loaded up his van.
      - #Drove to St. Louis to see his mom.
    - Last Monday.
      - #New Year's Eve.
      - #His 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.
      - #Drove to Atlanta, Georgia.
    - Why?
      - #Because he's following his star.
      - #Because he feels God has called him.
        - \*To go to Atlanta.
        - \*To be part of a church there.
          - +Not as the pastor.
          - +Not as a staff person.
          - +But as a lay member.
        - \*He went.
          - +Without a place to stay.
          - +Without a job.
        - \*Trusting that God would provide him everything he needed.
          - +To do what God was calling him to do.
            - =As of New Year's Day.
              - He had a place to stay.
            - =His next job.
              - Finding a job.
    - b. I believe God's star led Pam and me to this place.
      - But we came:
        - #After a job interview.
        - #After a house hunting expedition.
      - We came with a moving van full of stuff.
        - #We came with more faith than fear.
        - #It is that faith that has taken Joel to Atlanta, Georgia.

- c. Where is God's star leading us?
    - As a congregation.
    - As we begin a new year.
      - #Maybe it's not the "where" that is so important.
      - #But the faith.
        - \*God will give us.
          - + Individually.
          - + Collectively.
          - = Every gift.
          - = Every blessing.
            - To do what calls us to do.
        - \*We will "glow and grow in the light of the Lord."
          - + Not a star that is falling.
          - + But a star that is rising.
4. Light of the Lord.
  - a. Shines over the Christ child.
    - Born in Bethlehem.
  - b. Shines anew on Easter morning.
    - Light rising.
    - When God's light shines forth from an empty tomb.
  - c. Led the magi to Bethlehem.
    - To the "house of bread."
    - #Literally what the name Bethlehem means.
  - d. Leads us to this altar.
    - House of bread.
    - House of wine.
      - #To lift our eyes.
      - #To lift our hearts.
        - \*To see the star.
        - \*To see the light of Christ.
        - \*To see the light that shines in the darkness.
        - + John 1:5.

Concl: When the lights go out.  
 -Days grow dark.  
 -Nights grow darker still.

Look up.  
 -Don't be afraid.  
 -Gaze at the stars.  
 -Glow and grow in the light of the Lord.

